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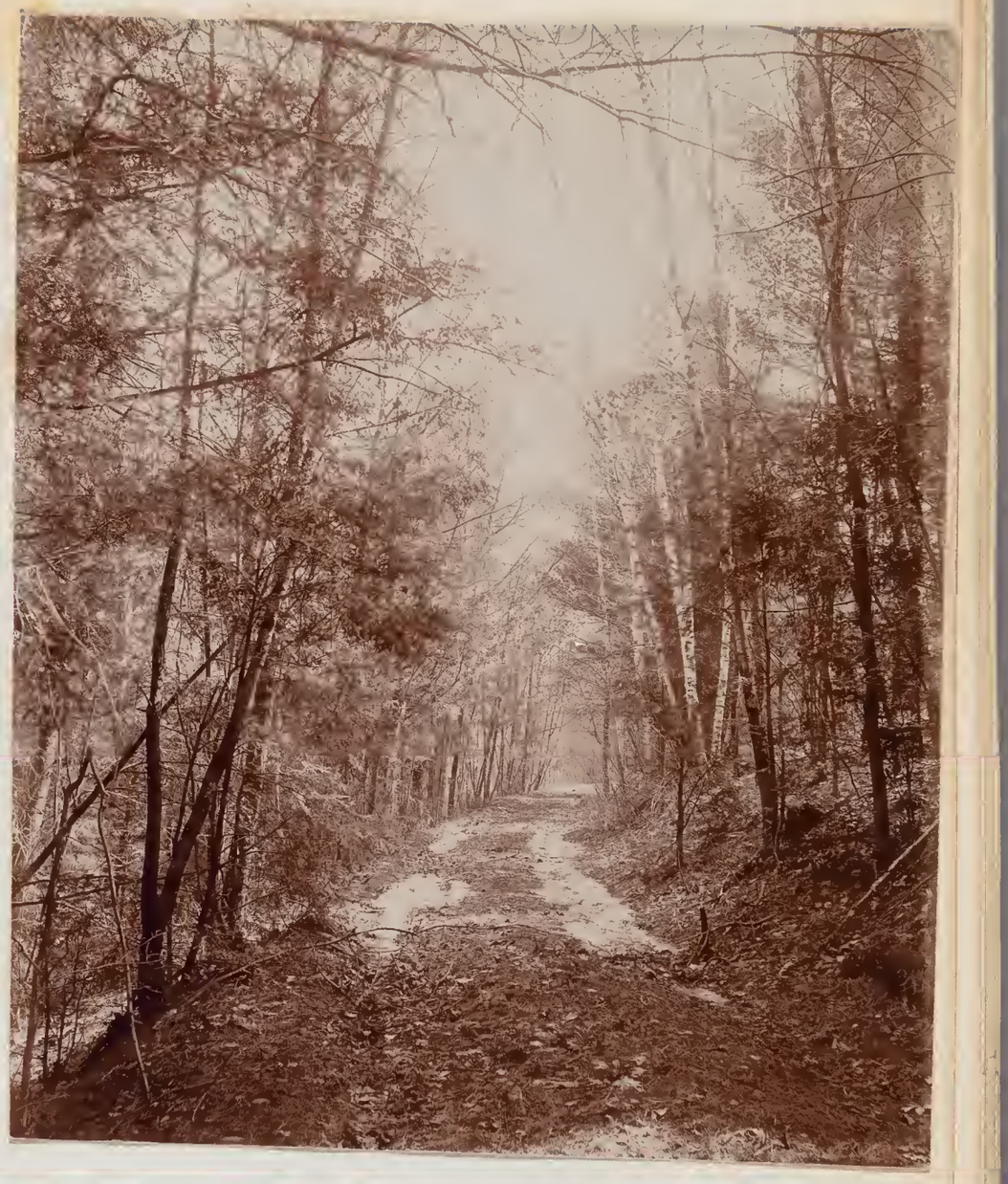

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# 862 Musk rat house, Concord River, Nov. 2, 1896
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H. W. Hinshaw for publication.

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Yo gr with Entry of May 4 1836, herewith.
J.C.C.

To go with Entry of May 2, 1934

1898
May 1

At 8.30 A. M. I started with Purdie down river in the old Buttrick boat, paddling, poling and rowing by turns, hugging the shores of the flooded meadow closely for the water is now as high as it was the middle of last March. We saw but few birds until we reached Lawrence's big woods where on landing we found a mixed flock of Yellow-rumps and Yellow Palm Warblers flitting about among the oaks and pines, darting out after flying insects and singing freely, the dry, chattering notes of the Palm Warblers blending with the much sweeter ones of the Yellow-rumps.

Young of Great Horned Owl.

Following the old woodpath we presently reached the top of the hill where a most interesting experience awaited us. As we began rambling about through the fine old woods, I noticed, every few steps, large pellets of fur and bones scattered about under the trees. I had just remarked to Purdie that a Great Horned Owl must have been living in the neighborhood and that it was probably the same bird which I have heard several times this spring near Ball's Hill when, raising my eyes, I saw what I took at first to be a dead Sheep lying at the foot of a large pine about thirty yards off but on approaching nearer we discovered that the whitish-looking object, very conspicuous on the russet-brown surface of the ground, was two young Great Horned Owls, huddled close together. They were fully three-quarters grown and already well-feathered, although enough down still adhered to the tips of the feathers to give them a generally whitish appearance. One of them opened its pale yellow eyes wide and stared at us with dull curiosity but the other kept its eyes tightly closed. We did not go near enough to disturb them seriously and we saw nothing of either of their parents. They

had probably fallen from a nest about as large as a Crow's nest which we could see in a fork of the pine, directly over their heads and about forty feet above the ground. By them lay the skin of a Rabbit apparently nearly entire and freshly torn off. The pine stands on level ground on the top of a ridge bordering the river meadow. The woods are at present about six acres in extent and are almost wholly composed or large, old white pines.

1898
May 2

In the afternoon I sailed down to the great Bedford Swamp where I dug some Rhodora bushes and then crossed the river (still under sail) to Lawrence's woods where I visited the young Great Horned Owls. They were in the same place but they had moved about one quarter around the trunk of the pine, evidently as I thought because the wind had changed, for yesterday, when it was north, they were on the south side of the tree and to-day, when it was south-east, on the north-west side.

While I was looking at them, standing about 20 yards away, one of the old birds began hooting in the pines behind me; presently it appeared and, flying from tree to tree, moved round me in a half circle, keeping just beyond gunrange and behaving in the most curious manner. Alighting close to the trunk of a pine, at a height of 30 or 40 feet above the ground, it would follow the branch out nearly to the end, walking steadily and at times rather quickly, its body horizontal, its wings wide-spread and flapping slowly like those of a big butterfly, its head lowered considerably below the line of the back, its horns slightly raised and its eyes glaring fiercely. It hooted every half minute or so in low, cooing tones. Its mate also hooted in answer but soon afterwards flew off to another piece of woods.

The moment he showed himself in the open, he was discovered by a Crow whose excited cawing brought others of his kind from every direction until within the next few minutes a dozen or more assembled and mobbed the Owl after their usual fashion.

I wonder why the Crows do not mob the young Owls. They must certainly be aware of their presence. The rabbit skin still lay by their side but it looked much smaller than it did yesterday and I think they have devoured part of it.

1898
May 4

In the afternoon sailed down stream to Lawrence's woods, taking my 5 x 7 camera and exposing a dozen plates on the young Great Horned Owls. When I first came in sight of them they were standing up a yard or more apart and a little distance from the tree. One of them repeatedly opened and stretched its wings but the next moment they discovered me when they at once toddled to the pine and crouched close against its trunk, touching one another. As I advanced the camera to within about two yards of them, they shrank back still closer to the tree and began snapping their bills but while I was taking the photographs they lay perfectly motionless. I saw no food and no pellets near them but the surface of the ground around the pine was white with their chalky excrement.

Before I got near the young the old birds began hooting and the male presently started off taking the same course as on May 2nd and again attracting a mob of Crows the moment he left the shelter of the woods. The female came about me in a half circle as usual, but for the first time she neglected the tactics which she has hitherto adopted and contended herself

taking short, restless flights, alighting high up in the trees and sitting erect and motionless when perched. This change of behavior interested me greatly. I interpret it to mean that she has discovered that it is useless to try to lead me away from her young by pretending that her wings are injured. Certainly I must have caused her much greater anxiety than on my previous occasion but possibly the very fact of my near approach to the young and the erection of the camera nearly over them convinced her that they were at my mercy and that nothing that she could do would be of any avail. She was much more noisy, however, than heretofore and I was deeply interested in the variety of sounds that she uttered.

At first she hooted the usual night strain but in subdued and muffled tones. Then she changed to a hoot which, if I am not mistaken, was identical with that of the honking Owl that sometimes visits our camp at Pine Point (Lake Umbagog, Maine) and which I have never before suspected could be a Bubo. She used this form of hoot during the latter half of my stay near the young. I noted it carefully on the spot, as follows: Hoo, hoo, hoo-hoo-hoo, hoo-hoo, hoo, given very rapidly and smoothly in very soft, low, cooing tones. Besides the hooting , she uttered a barking wah or waugh very like the bark of a dog (sometimes doubling this cry, i.e. wah-wah) and a rather prolonged squealing or whining outcry exceedingly similar to that of a hen Partridge with young.

The old Owls evidently spend the day in the densest part of these pine woods about 100 yards from where the young lie.

1898
May 7

In the afternoon I paddled down to Lawrence's woods taking my camera. The young Owls were gone and at first I neither saw nor heard either of the old birds but one of the latter began hooting presently and I think I must have started the other at about the same time, judging by the way the Crows gathered and clamored in the woods by the river into which the male Owl usually flies when disturbed. Two Red-shouldered Hawks also appeared over these woods, screaming incessantly for ten or fifteen minutes-- their shrill voices adding materially to the din kept up by the excited Crows. All the while one of the Owls remained near me in the tops of the pines, hooting at short, regular intervals, using always the ordinary night hoot -- hoo, hoo-hoo-hoo, hoo, hoo, but giving it in subdued tones.

But where were the young? I first examined the ground about the foot of the pine with great care. It was strewn with huge pellets of fur and bones and reeking with excrement, among which dung beetles were groping about, after their usual stupid fashion. There was an unmistakable but not very strong smell of Skunk mingled with the more offensive odors, but I failed to find any skunk hair or other remains. The ground was strewn in every direction with scraps of Rabbit skin, and all the pellets that I dissected were composed wholly of Rabbit's fur and bones. There were no feathers of Partridge or other birds. Besides the rabbit remains (representing a dozen or more of the poor bunnies, I should say) I found nothing identifiable excepting a Green Frog which had one side of its head torn open, but which was otherwise unmutilated.

My heart sank when I discovered a sort of trail of down, evidently that of the young Bubos, clinging to the tips of the low blueberry bushes and leading straight away from the pine for a distance of several yards. But after I had followed it to its termination and was looking ahead for further clues, my eyes were suddenly arrested by a yellowish patch on the end of a fallen trunk that was raised four or five feet above the ground and to my great delight I found that it was one of the young Owls. He was crouching so very flat and he lay so still as I approached that I feared at first that it was dead but he proved to be all right and I spent the next half hour photographing him, exposing ten plates in all. I did not succeed in finding the other young bird and I think it probable that he has been carried off by either a Dog or a Fox but of course he may have been hidden somewhere in the neighborhood and the trail of down may have had no real meaning, for the wind may have blown it into the tops of the bushes. The old Owl kept hooting all the time I was near the young bird but she did not once change her position or show herself.

1898
May 18

While in Lawremce's woods, I looked carefully and persistently for the Great Horned Owls. The old birds could not be found but, to my great delight, I at length discovered both the young perched side by side on the branch of a big pine nearly fifty feet above the ground, one standing erect, the other crouched lengthwise on the limb, like a big Goatsucker. It is little short of a miracle that both should have escaped the dangers which surrounded them. One looked much larger than the other. Both still retained a good deal of down, through which the mature feathers were beginning to show everywhere.

1898
June 2

Pat told me yesterday that Davis (the marketman) had a young Great Horned Owl that had been given to him alive by Lawrence! I asked him to make further inquiries and to-day he brought word that Lawrence had found two young Owls in his woods by the river. One he caught, the other escaped. Davis was kind enough to send me the captive bird which I shall restore to its native woods as soon as it can fly well. It is the larger of the two and looks much as it did when I last saw it in the tall pine. I hope that it is true that the other young escaped.

1898
JUNE 21

It is time to take up the history of the young Great Horned Owl that I had of Davis. Shortly after getting him, I saw Henry Lawrence who told me that he found the two young sitting side by side on the branch of a tall pine in the woods by the river. As he approached, the larger one flew and he shot it, breaking its wing. He did not molest the other young bird but he fired at and, as he thinks, wounded one of the parents.

I kept this young Owl in a cage in the woods near the cabin for upwards of two weeks. Like all of its fierce race, it was surly and untamable, threatening every one who approached it closely, by snapping its bill and making quick thrusts with its formidable talons. It finally learned to tolerate Gilbert, however, and took raw meat from his fingers thanklessly enough but without much active resentment. At intervals of from one to five minutes during the night and occasionally by day, as well, it uttered a short, harsh, penetrating cry which was not unlike the peep of Chordiles and which, no doubt, was merely a

variation -- perhaps characteristic of very young birds -- of the Jay-like cry that I hear every autumn at Lake Umbagog. I suspect that by means of this call it finally attracted the attention of one of its parents for early one morning a number of Crows began making a great outcry in the oaks over the cage and Gilbert, who went out to investigate the cause of the disturbance, found them mobbing a large Owl which sailed off through the trees as he approached.

On June 14th, Gilbert, by my orders, liberated the young Owl in Prescott's pines which are within about five hundred yards of the place where it was born. It was unable to fly and was left sitting on the ground under the trees near the wood road at the foot of the hill. During the remainder of the week Gilbert visited and fed the bird daily. It shifted its position several times and finally crossed the road but no one of these journeys was more than a few rods in length and the bird was always found either on the ground or on a stump or log.

I directed my steps towards Prescott's pines this evening for the express purpose of looking up the young Owl and as I approached the place I saw something yellowish which I took to be the bird but which proved to be a sheet of brown paper. A moment later I heard some Jays screaming excitedly on the hillside about sixty yards off. Walking quietly along the path I came nearly under them and scrutinizing closely the trees around me I at length made out the form of a Great Horned Owl perched on the topmost spray of a green and vigorous young pine, sitting erect and motionless, gazing off over the woods towards

the west as if absorbed in watching the sunset. Against the strongly lighted background of sky his figure stood out in bold relief. He was a small but fully adult male bird and no doubt the father of the two young which were reared this spring in Lawrence's woods. His coloring was very light and grayish, his "horns" unusually long and prominent. He had probably found and was caring for the young bird which Gilbert had left at the foot of the hill.

As I stood watching him, peering up through a small opening in the pine branches which concealed me very effectually, the Jays (there were but two of them and they were doubtless the pair whose nest Gilbert found a week or more ago near the place where he turned out the young Owl) attacked him repeatedly and with much spirit, dashing past him within a foot or less and striking at his head with their bills, screaming all the while, of course. He paid little attention to them but once, when one of them came over him suddenly from behind, he ducked his head nervously. At length I moved slightly and he at once discovered me, fixing his great eyes on me for a moment and then flying off over the woods in the direction of Ball's Hill. Altogether it was an interesting experience to have in these Concord woods. I did not see the young Owl, however,